

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

And so, on this fourth Sunday of Advent, we turn to the fourth Beatitude today.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they will be filled.”

The Living Word of God...

Thanks, be to God...

Let me just say that this morning, I feel incredibly filled. I dined at a rich feast yesterday, which was made possible by your call to serve as your pastor and God filled me up so much so that this morning's message is certainly not as I planned earlier this week. My husband will attest to the fact, that I have thrown out entire sermons before and this truth holds true for today!

I was asked yesterday, if I had slept well with the assumption that I would not have in anticipation of the big day. Yet, I slept wonderfully Friday night. The same cannot be said for last night! I was so full... with gratitude, with joy, with appreciation of all that it took to make yesterday such a meaningful day that my night last night was spent giving thanks! I didn't have a hunger or a thirst, because I had dined as if at a rich feast at the banqueting table of God.

My fullness last night though, reminded me of a time when I was on empty, as I made my way to my computer early this morning. It was years back when I was thankfully on my way to a Companions on the Inner Way Contemplative Retreat. I was coming to that particular week from a parched and dry place. A psalm similar to Psalm 63 was part of the liturgy on Wednesday, for Psalm 63 is only one of many psalms that speak of our hunger and thirst for God. As we heard this morning, the psalmist begins by saying, “O God, you are my God, I seek you, my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you...”

Do you seek God? Do you thirst for God? Do you seek an ever-deeper relationship with God? And if you do, how do you make yourself available to God? I have shared some of the spiritual practices that I employ in my own life to cultivate my relationship with God... times of prayer, of scripture reading, of journaling, of beholding the wonders of creation and of silence, but what do you do?

I arrived at Companions, that many years ago, parched, dry and even a little brittle. I was thirsting and hungering, but wasn't sure how I would be satisfied. And then the Wednesday night preacher brought me to well of living water, for we were asked to read a psalm about thirsting and longing for God the Ignatian Way.

Ignatius of Loyola was a 16th century Spanish priest and theologian who founded the religious order of the Jesuits and the Ignatian Way was developed from his writings. To read a psalm the Ignatian Way, everywhere the word God is written, you replace it with your name, because instead of the psalmist speaking to God... God is now speaking to the psalmist and to you and me!

Remember our psalm? It begins like this:

O **God**, you are my **God**, I seek you,

my soul thirsts for you;

my flesh faints for you,

as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.

Let me demonstrate what an Ignatian rewrite might sound like. Imagine though, where you hear my name, you would place yours...

O Cheryl, you are my daughter, I seek you,
my soul thirsts for you,
my flesh faints for you,
as in a dry and weary land
where there is not water.

I have looked upon you Cheryl
Beholding your belovedness,
I long for you.

My heart soars as with a rich feast,
when we are together.

God longs for me! God longs for you! This experience completed changed my understanding of my own hunger and thirst for God, because I realized at a deeper level that God hungers and thirsts for me. Wow... God has a thirst for you! Sit with that for a moment...

God hungers and thirsts for you and you and you... God desires a relationship with you and you and you...

I remember reading the psalmist again and again inserting my name, and all of sudden my seeking... my striving... my relentless activity surrounding my hunger and thirst for God melted as these words penetrated my heart. God wasn't hard to find, I didn't have to relentlessly seek God. God had been waiting for me to show up! God had been waiting for me to come and sit a spell with God. God hungered and thirsted for a relationship with me before that thought ever entered my mind.

This experience brought tears to my eyes because God desired a relationship with me as much and maybe even more than I had come to that week years ago thirsting and hungering for God. Friends, God hungers and thirsts for you. God desires a deep and abiding relationship with you. [Pause]

Before I move us to the Beatitude, I wanted to share with you one of my spiritual practices. One of the opportunities at Companions on the Inner Way is to integrate what we have heard creatively into something we can take with us. One particular practice I was introduced to, was to create what is called a soul card or a prayer card. Well, I have brought my prayer card that was inspired by this revolutionary message that God hungers and thirsts for me. I know you can't all see it, but at the bottom are dry roasted and salted nuts. Think about the thirst these would create! There is also desert cactus, a dry field, and even a howling wolf. Then there are the words... "I thirst for you!" With the "I" being "God." Sitting with this card in prayer, moves me. It humbles me, because God... the God of the universe wants to know me, to spend time with me, to laugh with me, to cry with me, to be in relationship with me... Wow!

I'm not sure whether or not you, as you heard me read Psalm 63 the Ignatian Way, whether or not you considered that God could speak these very same words to you. But, I believe if you dare to do so, it will help you begin to understand our Beatitude this morning. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled." Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for a deep and abiding, a healthy and whole, a right relationship with God who loves them more than they can imagine.

Yet, how many of us are sometimes more like Charlie Brown who began a letter to his pen pal saying, "I would have written sooner, but I forgot about you." Like Charlie Brown, we may very well forget our relationship with God or we might ignore, cover up or even deny our hungers and thirsts for God.

Mary Lou Redding writes this, "Our culture makes it possible for us to keep our lives so busy that we can ignore our spiritual hungers and thirsts. We can entertain ourselves or exercise ourselves or work ourselves so hard in so many places even in church that we do not heed little nudging's of our spirit or of the Holy Spirit. Though our calendars may be full to overflowing, we can remain empty and unsatisfied at the deepest levels of our beings."

This Beatitude though speaks to ours and our world's deepest longings, the most ravenous hungers and seemingly unquenchable thirsts. And the word that speaks to these longings is *righteousness*.

This Beatitude is saying that seeking *righteousness* will fill our deepest longings! This is Jesus' promise to us. Jesus used the word *righteousness* because it means to be in right relationship with God **and with other people**. It means to be right in character and action, to do the right things for the right reasons. Righteousness means we open ourselves to God and to others with the expectation that we will be changed. Righteousness means that we **yearn for what God wants** by placing ourselves at the center of God's heart. Righteousness means we want what is right, what is right **for all people**, not just some people; for ourselves **and for all others**. Hungering and thirsting for righteousness will influence the way we live out our lives.

To hunger and thirst for righteousness is not something we do every now and then or an activity we check off on a to-do list. It is also not about being completely "right" or perfectly "right" or what we think of when we hear the word "righteous". That is, righteousness is not about self-righteous! Rather it is about being hungry and being thirsty for justice for all.

Brian McLaren at Companions on the Inner Way earlier this month pressed this Beatitude further saying, "Are you hungry for empowering those who feel powerless? Are you thirsty for the common good that considers all people, not just some people? Are you starving for the establishment of equity so that all people, not just some people have food security and access to healthcare, have a place to safely rest their tired bodies at night and productive opportunities to employ their skills? What are we hungering and thirsting for?"

Righteousness means that we **yearn for what God wants**. Do we yearn for the world that God desires? Do we yearn for heaven on earth, as we pray each Sunday? Or is our hunger and thirst just about us?

These Beatitudes build one upon another... And I hope you are beginning to hear the both...AND...

for theirs is the kingdom of God

for they will be comforted.

for they shall inherit the earth.

for they will be filled...

Something happens to us, yet something is also required of us. We are comforted and filled, yet we are called to exhibit the kingdom of God on the earth we have inherited!

This hunger and thirst isn't only about meeting our needs and then simply saying, "Thank you, God, all is right for ME!" This hunger and thirst draws us to God, so that God can

equip us and send us into the world. [Pause]

Through this Beatitude God is inviting us to a banqueting table with a welcoming sign that says Bon Appétit. Bon Appétit, as you probably know is French and it simply means, “enjoy the meal!”

God is saying to us, “Come, come and bring your hungers and thirsts for they will be satisfied with me.” Come, come and bring your hungers and thirsts, for I don’t want the meal I prepared for you to go to waste!

Our deepest longings, our deepest hungers and thirsts... those gnawing holes in our souls will only be satisfied by a feast with our living God. As Augustine once said, “Our hearts are restless, until they can find rest in you [O God].”

The table is set! And God is waiting for your arrival! “Will we accept God’s invitation to feast at the table God has before us?” Will we remember that God thirsts for us? Will we remember that God hungers for us?

God beckons us to the table saying, “Bon Appétit!” Not once, but daily. Not even daily, but every moment of every day the feast is waiting! God knows that if we feast at God’s table, then we too will hunger and thirst for right relationships with all others, not just some others. Knowing that when we are filled, we will be equipped to usher in the reign of God no matter what it takes! I pray with all my heart that we will sit at table with our God and enjoy the feast, so we will be prepared to be sent out! Amen.